ATLANTA-CHATTANOOGA
HIGH SPEED GROUND TRANSPORTATION PROJECT

TIER 1 COMBINED FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND RECORD OF DECISION (TIER 1 FEIS/ROD)

Prepared by:
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)
Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)
Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT)

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ATLANTA-CHATTANOOGA
HIGH SPEED GROUND TRANSPORTATION PROJECT

Tier 1 Combined Final Environmental Impact Statement,
Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation, and Record of Decision

Pursuant to:
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 USC Section 4321 et seq.), and implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), 23 CFR 771, Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (49 USC 303) and implementing regulations (23 CFR Part 774); Federal Railroad Administration, Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 Federal Register 28545); National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC 306101 et seq.) and implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800); Clean Air Act as amended (42 USC 7401 et seq.) and implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 51 and 93); the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531-1544) and implementing regulations (50 CFR Part 402); Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251-1387) and implementing regulations (33 CFR Parts 320 to 324 and 40 CFR Part 230); and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (36 CFR Part 59).

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ABSTRACT

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), initiated a program-level Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation for the proposed Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) Project (hereinafter referred to as the Project) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and its implementing regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations CFR Parts 1500-1508); Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU); Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21); the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (Public Law 114-94); and FRA's *Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts* (64 Federal Register 28545). The Project is a comprehensive planning effort to evaluate and identify a corridor for proposed, new high-speed intercity passenger rail service connecting Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. A program-level Tier 1 EIS is prepared when large geographic areas are being addressed for proposed improvements, allowing the Project sponsor to review reasonable HSGT corridors, general environmental conditions, and potential impacts. The Draft EIS (DEIS) was issued on October 7, 2016 with the public and agency review and comment period occurring between October 7, 2016 and December 31, 2016.

The primary purpose of this combined Tier 1 Final EIS (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (hereinafter referred to as Tier 1 FEIS/ROD) is to respond to substantive comments received during the public and agency review and comment period. Responses are in the form of factual corrections or clarifications and are presented as errata-style edits in a table format attached to the Tier 1 DEIS (DEIS Errata Sheets) and document the changes made to the DEIS that are now reflected in the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. The preparation of a FEIS by errata sheets attached to the DEIS if certain conditions are met is set forth in 23 USC Section 139(n). As a result of the FAST Act, 23 USC Section 139(n) and 49 USC Section 304(a) require, to the maximum extent practicable, and unless certain conditions exist, that the lead United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) agency expeditiously develop a single NEPA document that combines the FEIS and ROD. The use of errata sheets and this combined FEIS/ROD comply with the requirements of the FAST Act. The ROD states the decision, identifies the alternatives considered in reaching the decision, summarizes avoidance, minimization, and mitigation strategies and future design practices appropriate for this Tier 1 EIS, and states the next steps in the environmental review process that may occur with subsequent phases of the Project. Members of the public, project stakeholders, local governments, elected officials, non-governmental organizations, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies have been and will continue to be involved in the Project throughout any subsequent phases of the Project.

This Tier 1 FEIS/ROD describes and summarizes the potential environmental, transportation, and economic effects of a No Build and three Corridor Alternatives for new high-speed intercity passenger rail service on the population, built, and natural environments within the Project Study Area. The FRA identified a NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative based on analysis presented in the Tier 1 DEIS, input from the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies. The I-75 Corridor Alternative is the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative and most effectively achieves the Purpose and Need and is the best performing corridor alternative based on the 12 distinguishing performance measures developed for the Project for this program-level Tier 1 EIS and the input received.

The FRA will hold at least a 30-day waiting period after the release of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD allowing the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies the opportunity to review and provide input on the Preferred Corridor Alternative and the contents of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. This will not be a formal review and comment period and the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will not respond to individual comments as was required during the Tier 1 DEIS. Rather, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will consider input received on the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD for any subsequent phases of the Project, which may include a Tier 2 NEPA process wherein more detailed environmental analyses would be conducted, potential alignments within the Preferred Corridor Alternative will be configured, exact station locations will be identified, a HSGT vehicle storage and maintenance facility site will be evaluated and selected, an HSGT technology will be evaluated and selected, all applicable permits will be identified, and location-specific avoidance and mitigation measures will be defined.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reader's Guide

This section presents guidance on how to "use" this document, defines key concepts and terminology used in the environmental analyses, and provides the overall organization of this combined Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (hereinafter referred to as Tier 1 FEIS/ROD).

1.1.1 How to Use this Document

This document contains a combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD for the Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT) Project (the Project). The Tier 1 ROD describes the "NEPA Preferred Alternative" as described, evaluated, and recommended in the *Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (October 2016), and includes all technical reports and supporting documentation, incorporated by reference and selected as the Preferred Corridor Build Alternative for the Project in the Tier 1 FEIS attached to this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD document. The Tier 1 FEIS includes clarifications, errata-style edits, and specific comments related to information provided in the Tier 1 DEIS and is presented in a table format noting sections of the Tier 1 DEIS where the changes appear. The entire Tier 1 DEIS, including appendices, is presented here and is updated to reflect changes noted during the public and agency review and comment period (October 7, 2016 to December 31, 2016) based on the information noted in the Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table and Sheets (**Section 3.3** and **Table 3-2**).

1.1.2 Consistency Between the Tier 1 DEIS and the Tier 1 FEIS

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) used the same key concepts presented in the Tier 1 DEIS for the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD to maintain consistency between the evaluation of the No Build Alternative, Corridor Alternatives, and the identification of the NEPA Preferred Alternative.

1.1.3 Key Concepts and Terminology

The following key concepts on the level of environmental detail and analysis remain constant between the Tier 1 DEIS and the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD:

Corridor Alternatives: The Corridor Alternatives are those areas that are approximately 1,000 feet in width that lie within the Project Study Area and generally follow existing transportation corridors or connect existing transportation corridors where a potential HSGT Project may be implemented. They define the areas where Tier 2 NEPA studies would be performed, including the definition of potential HSGT alignments and other transportation improvements included in Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs) within the Project Study Area, during subsequent phases of the Project.

Preferred Corridor Alternative: The Preferred Corridor Alternative is the best performing corridor alternative based on the performance measures defined in the Tier 1 DEIS. It rates High for most performance measures and does not rate Low for any performance measures. The Preferred Corridor Alternative is documented in **Section 3.0** of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD and is also referred to as the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative in **Section 2.0** of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD to be consistent with CEQ requirements for Tier 1 EIS documents. The Preferred Corridor Alternative may be the subject of additional planning work or Tier 2 NEPA studies during subsequent phases of the Project.

Project Study Area: For the purpose of this Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, FRA, GDOT and TDOT defined a broad geographic Project Study Area that is contained, wholly or in part, in the following counties arranged in alphabetic order: Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga,

Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Douglas, Floyd, Fulton, Gordon, Murray, Paulding, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield Counties of Georgia; and Hamilton County of Tennessee. The Project Study Area is shown in **Figure 1-1**.

High Speed Ground Transportation (HSGT): For the purposes of this Tier 1 EIS process, FRA defines HSGT as an exclusive guideway, intercity passenger ground transportation facility–by steel-wheel railroad or magnetic levitation (Maglev)—that is time competitive with air travel and/or auto travel markets in the approximate range of 100 to 500 miles. A "market" is defined as a city pair - two metropolitan areas and markets that, by their proximity and configuration, lend themselves to efficient service by ground transportation modes.

Level of Detail: The level of detail presented in the Tier 1 EIS is consistent with the FRA's tiered environmental review process. FRA's guidance suggests that a tiered NEPA process is appropriate for FRA projects where broad program decisions for large expansive corridor programs are 1) too complex to be addressed in one document; 2) are phased over time; 3) where future phases are not fully defined; or 4) when major routing or service alternatives need to be evaluated.

Horizon Years: As part of the NEPA environmental review process, a "horizon year" is considered when conducting analysis and considering potential environmental consequences of transportation projects. The horizon year refers to the future timeframe within which environmental consequences for a proposed action will be evaluated and is consistent with the future timeframes for the Long Range Transportation Plans (LRTP) for each of the five MPOs that serve the Project Study Area. With the exception of the Greater Dalton MPO, all MPOs have LRTPs with a horizon year of 2040. The Greater Dalton MPO LRTP has a horizon year of 2035. Although two different horizon years are considered in this analysis, all known proposed transportation projects that would be constructed and/or in operation during the same timeframe as the proposed HSGT Project and are within the Project Study Area are reflected in this analysis.

Data Sources, References, and Geographic Information System (GIS) Tools: Secondary source data (GIS data, published reports, technical analyses from USDOT, GDOT, TDOT and other government agencies, U.S. Census Bureau data) readily available from Federal, State, and local agencies and governments were analyzed as part of this Tier 1 EIS process. No fieldwork or subsurface testing any kind occurred as part of this Tier 1 EIS process. A GIS database using desktop analysis was developed to define the characteristics of the Corridor Alternatives, such as existing environmental conditions, existing and future transportation facilities and existing and future land use and land cover characteristics. The database contains resource-specific data and information used to create GIS shapefiles or layers. The interaction of the GIS shapefiles defined the affected environment and was used to assess the environmental consequences in the Tier 1 DEIS desktop analysis.

Effects Assessment and Methodologies: The same effects assessments and methodologies, data sources, and data sets presented in the Tier 1 DEIS to evaluate the No Build Alternative and the Corridor Alternatives were used in the Tier 1 FEIS.

Definition of the No Build Alternative: The definition of the No Build Alternative remained the same from the Tier 1 DEIS and the Tier 1 FEIS. The No Build Alternative encompasses the existing transportation system and all planned transportation projects listed in the LRTPs for each MPO in the Project Study Area excluding any HSGT-related projects.

Evaluation of the Preferred Corridor Alternative: The Preferred Corridor Alternative was evaluated and compared to the No Build Alternative using the same performance measures and resource categories used to compare the other Corridor Alternatives in the Tier 1 DEIS. The Preferred Corridor Alternative emerged as the best performing corridor alternative in the Tier 1 DEIS. The evaluation procedures are described in **Chapter 6.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS.

Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation: The Tier 1 DEIS contains a Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation prepared to comply with the USDOT Act of 1966 (49 USC Section 303), hereinafter referred to as "Section 4(f)" and FRA's *Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts* (64 Federal Register 28545). The same effects assessments and methodologies, data sources, and data sets presented in the Tier 1 DEIS to evaluate potential Section 4(f) impacts from the No Build Alternative and the Corridor Alternatives were used in the Tier 1 FEIS.

1.1.4 Contents of this Combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD

This Tier 1 FEIS/ROD contains the Tier 1 ROD, Tier 1 FEIS, which is presented as an errata table recording the appropriate chapters and page numbers of the Tier 1 DEIS where edits were made, and the following Tier 1 FEIS/ROD Appendices:

- **Appendix A**: Tier 1 DEIS and Appendices. The Tier 1 DEIS was edited based on the changes included in the Tier 1 FEIS errata table and is presented here with the Tier 1 DEIS Errata Sheets as the Tier 1 FEIS.

- **Appendix B**: *Tier 1 DEIS Public and Agency Involvement Summary Report*, including a comments and responses matrix for all comments received during the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency comment period and responses from FRA, GDOT, and TDOT included in the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD.

- **Appendix C**: Copies of all correspondence received from Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies, including letters and emails, during the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review period.

Each component of this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD is summarized in the sections below.

1.1.4.1 Tier 1 ROD

FRA indicated in the Tier 1 DEIS that the agency intended to issue a combined FEIS/ROD pursuant to provisions under MAP-21 and the FAST Act. The Tier 1 ROD provides a written public record for FRA's decision that identifies the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative, alternatives considered in the Tier 1 EIS process, and states how FRA's decision was made. The Tier 1 ROD issuance completes the Tier 1 NEPA process and provides the basis for future Tier 2 NEPA studies that may occur in subsequent phases of the Project.

1.1.4.2 Tier 1 FEIS

The Tier 1 FEIS discloses all environmental effects associated with the Project, whether they are adverse or beneficial, and identifies the Preferred Corridor Alternative. The Tier 1 FEIS includes all comments received on the Tier 1 DEIS and responds to those comments. Responses are in the form of factual corrections or clarifications and are presented as errata-style edits in a table format attached to the Tier 1 DEIS and document the changes made to the DEIS that are now reflected in the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. The preparation of a FEIS by errata sheets attached to the DEIS if certain conditions are met is set forth in 23 USC Section 139(n). As a result of the FAST Act, 23 USC Section 139(n) and 49 USC Section 304(a) require, to the maximum extent practicable, and unless certain conditions exist, that the lead United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) agency expeditiously develop a single NEPA document that combines the FEIS and ROD. The use of a Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table and Sheets attached to the Tier 1 DEIS and presented as **Appendix B** of this combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD comply with the requirements of the FAST Act.

1.1.4.3 Tier 1 DEIS and Tier 1 DEIS Appendices

The Tier 1 DEIS considers all significant issues related to the Project identified during scoping, establishes the Purpose and Need for the Project, discloses the alternatives considered and evaluates the alternatives against the Purpose and Need, discloses all environmental effects potentially associated with the Project's alternatives, whether they are adverse or beneficial, identifies a best performing alternative based on the performance measures developed for the Tier 1 EIS process, and establishes a public and agency review and comment period on the document, including public meetings and how to participate in the public and agency review and comment period. The Tier 1 DEIS Appendices present detailed technical documentation and relevant coordination materials that support the information and findings presented in the Tier 1 DEIS chapters.

1.2 About the Project

The Project is a comprehensive planning effort, including a transparent public and agency involvement process, to evaluate and identify a corridor for proposed, new high-speed intercity passenger rail service connecting Atlanta, Georgia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The project consists of a Tiered NEPA environmental review process that implements FRA's "Service NEPA" for High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Corridor Programs. Service NEPA (which the Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ] refers to as programmatic NEPA) typically addresses the broader questions relating to the type of service(s) being proposed, including cities and stations served, route alternatives, service levels, types of operations (speed and technology), ridership forecasts, planning-level costs, and other components for future decision-making milestones. For a major FRA HSIPR Corridor Program, this type of environmental review must be completed before any substantial investments in the corridor can be made, including additional planning, design, and engineering work and Tier 2 NEPA for subsequent phases of the Project.

The Project did not involve fieldwork, preliminary engineering or design work, selection of an HSGT technology, selection of locations or recommendations of locations for HSGT alignments, HSGT station sites, HSGT station facilities, or an HSGT vehicle storage and maintenance facility (VSMF). Additional planning, design, and engineering work or Tier 2 NEPA during subsequent phases of the Project may involve the selection of an HSGT technology and HSGT components within the Preferred Corridor Alternative described in this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. Technical reports supporting the development of preliminary corridor alternatives through a detailed screening process, including the three Corridor Alternatives evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS, preliminary planning-level cost estimates and identification of potential funding sources, ridership forecasts, and environmental existing conditions and evaluation methodologies were developed for the Project and are included with this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD.

1.3 Application of the FAST Act Provisions

Section 1304 of the FAST Act, Efficient Environmental Reviews for Project Decision Making, sets forth the changes to Title 23 USC Section 139. In particular, subsection (j), Accelerated Decision Making; Improving Transparency in Environmental Reviews, amends 23 USC Section 139 by adding subjection (n), Accelerated Decision Making in Environmental Reviews. 23 USC 139(n) provides for the preparation of an FEIS, including a Tier 1 FEIS, by attaching errata sheets to the DEIS if certain conditions are met. In addition, Section 139(n)(2) requires, to the maximum extent practicable, and unless certain conditions exist, that the lead USDOT agency expeditiously develop a single, combined FEIS/ROD, including a single, combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. See also 49 USC Section 304(a). Therefore, errata sheets and the combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD provisions can be used together, as long as conditions of both subsections are met. With the issuance of this combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, FRA establishes that the conditions of both subsections of 23 USC Section 139 have been met.

1.3.1 Use of Errata Table and Sheets

The use of an errata table and sheets in lieu of rewriting the Tier 1 DEIS is appropriate when comments received on a DEIS, including a Tier 1 DEIS, are minor and the responses to those comments are limited to factual corrections or explanations of why the comments do not warrant further response. When applying Title 23 USC Section 139(n)(1), the errata sheets will be made available to the public and agencies to the same extent as the Tier 1 DEIS and continued availability of the Tier 1 DEIS will be ensured. Comments received from the public and agencies require only factual corrections and minor clarifications to the Tier 1 DEIS; however, no comments on the Tier 1 DEIS warranted further response in the form of additional alternatives or consideration of undisclosed environmental consequences or impacts. The Tier 1 DEIS is currently available for continued public and agency review on the GDOT and FRA project websites and at main branch library locations throughout the Project Study Area (see **Appendix B**). The Tier 1 DEIS errata are included in this combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD and are also available with the Tier 1 DEIS on the project websites and at the locations noted in **Appendix B**. The Tier 1 DEIS is included as **Appendix A** of this combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD document and issued as the Tier 1 FEIS for the Project with the Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table and Sheets attached to indicate where changes were made in the Tier 1 DEIS document.

1.3.2 Combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD

Traditionally, and in accordance with the CEQ Regulations set forth in 40 CFR Section 1506 10(b)(2), FEIS and ROD documents, including Tier 1 FEIS and Tier 1 ROD documents, are issued separately with a minimum 30-day period between the FEIS and ROD, including a Tier 1 FEIS and Tier ROD. As explained above, the FAST Act, to the maximum extent practicable, directs the Federal lead agency to expeditiously develop a combined FEIS/ROD, including a combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD unless the following occur:

- The FEIS or Tier 1 FEIS makes substantial changes to the proposed action that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns or
- There is a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns and that bears on the proposed action or the impacts of the proposed action.

Additionally, the applicable requirements for both an FEIS and a ROD, including a Tier 1 FEIS and a Tier 1 ROD, must be met for the issuance of a single, combined FEIS/ROD document or Tier 1 FEIS/ROD document. This combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD does not include substantial changes to the proposed action in terms of environmental or safety concerns, nor are there significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns of the proposed action or its impacts, as set forth in the law.

Through the results of the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review period that closed on December 31, 2016, the Project has met the requirements for the issuance of a single combined Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, including the following:

- Identification of a NEPA Preferred Alternative, which is also the Preferred Corridor Alternative as described in **Section 3.1** of the Tier 1 FEIS;
- Preliminary, corridor-level Section 4(f) screening and evaluation;
- Initiation of the Section 106 consultation process;
- Identification of potential mitigation activities for the Preferred Corridor Alternative included in the Tier 1 FEIS; and

- Summary of comments received on the Tier 1 DEIS, public meeting responses included in the Tier 1 FEIS, and public and agency coordination activities that have taken place since the issuance of the Tier 1 DEIS included in **Appendix B** of this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD.

1.4 Tiered NEPA Process

FRA, in cooperation with GDOT and TDOT, prepared a Tier 1 EIS to evaluate the program-level environmental consequences of a proposed new high-speed intercity passenger rail service corridor connecting Atlanta, GA and Chattanooga, TN. FRA is using a tiered NEPA environmental review process. The Atlanta – Chattanooga HSGT Project Tier 1 EIS process began with FRA's publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on August 22, 2007. The NOI announced the intent to prepare a Tier 1 EIS. Following the NOI, a scoping process was undertaken to inform the public, interest groups, and involved agencies about the proposed Project, Corridor Alternatives, and issues for public and agency review and input. Comments and recommendations received during the scoping process by the public, stakeholders and agencies were used to refine the Project's Purpose and Need Statement, Corridor Alternatives, and the scope of the environmental analysis to be included in the Tier 1 EIS process. FRA is the lead Federal agency responsible for conducting the Tier 1 NEPA environmental review process for the Project and issuing this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. When the Tier 1 EIS process was initiated, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and FRA served as co-Lead agencies for the Project. As such, the agency coordination and consultation was conducted in accordance with the requirements of both agencies. By letter dated July 15, 2014, FHWA requested to have their role changed from a co-Federal lead agency to a participating agency and FRA agreed.

The Tier 1 EIS for the Project is a program-level document. A program-level Tier 1 EIS is prepared when large geographic areas are being addressed for proposed improvements, allowing FRA to review reasonable HSGT corridors, general environmental conditions, and potential impacts. The DEIS was issued on October 7, 2016 with the public and agency review and comment period occurring between October 7, 2016 and December 31, 2016. The Tier 1 EIS process involved the selection of the Preferred Corridor Alternative. Tier 2 NEPA will evaluate specific alignment routes within the Preferred Corridor Alternative selected in Tier 1 environmental review process. For example, in this Tier 1 EIS, exact locations of stations and potential maintenance and storage facilities sites were not determined. Furthermore, a preferred technology for the HSGT will not be selected until Tier 2 NEPA occurs. FRA, in coordination with GDOT and TDOT, may determine the type of Tier 2 NEPA documents to be prepared in subsequent phases of the Project. The Tier 2 NEPA documents could include any of the following of three types based upon the proposed action to implement new HSGT service within the Preferred Corridor Alternative:

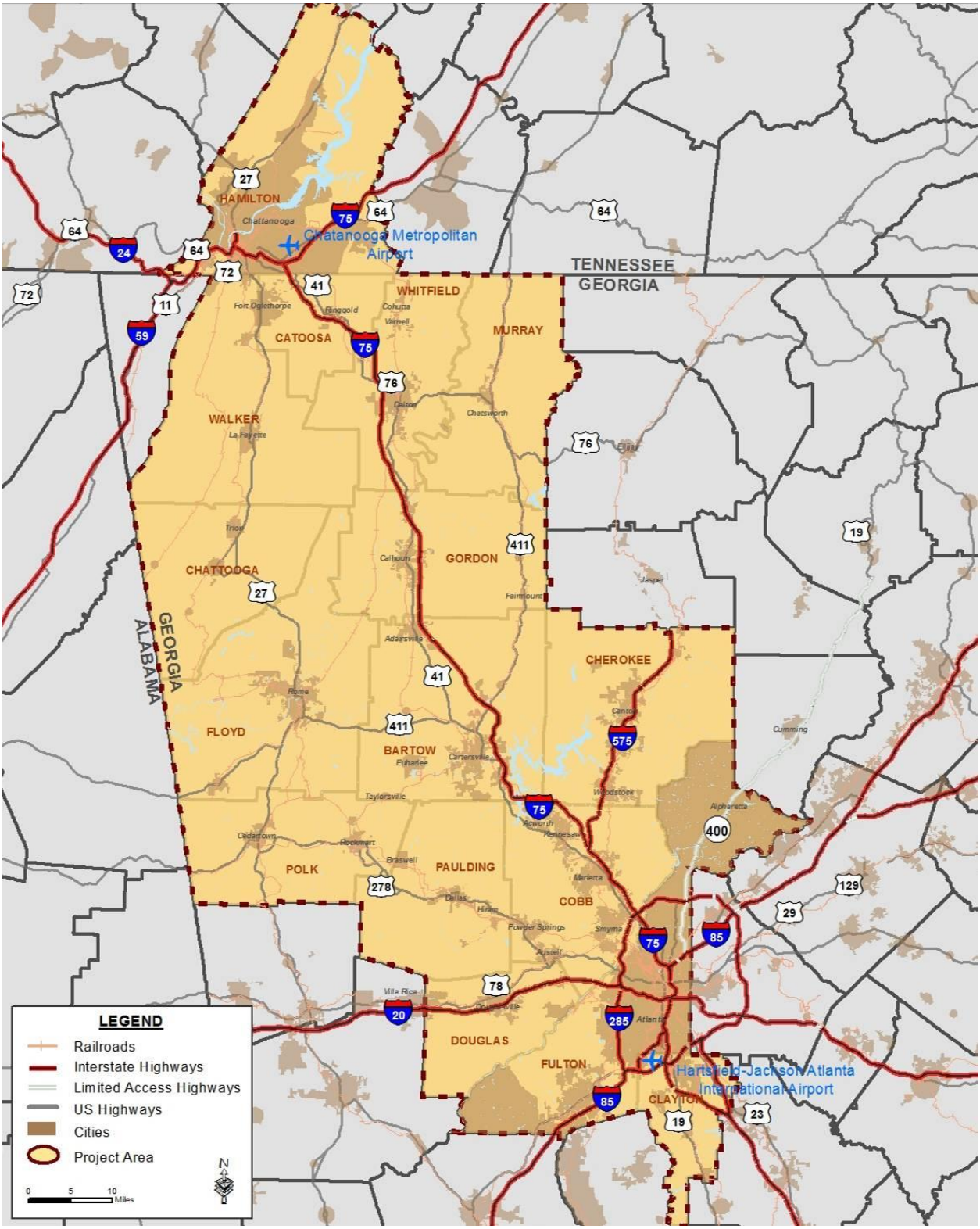
- Categorical Exclusions (CEs) for actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant environmental effect;

- Environmental Assessments (EAs) for actions in which the significance of the environmental impact is not clearly established. EAs can lead to the development of EIS documents or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); or

- Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for projects where it is known that the action will have significant environmental effect and comprehensive analysis is needed to determine the environmental consequences of the proposed action.

Should Tier 2 NEPA studies occur, the scope of the evaluations will be appropriately matched to the proposed action as determined by the FRA or other Federal lead agency. The public and agency involvement efforts initiated in the Tier 1 EIS process will continue and any required permitting processes necessary for project implementation will occur. In addition, actions to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse environmental consequences will be determined. As of the date of issuance of this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, neither GDOT nor TDOT has identified any funding for Tier 2 NEPA studies.

Figure 1-1: Project Study Area Map



Sources: Transportation Demand Models for ARC, Greater Dalton MPO, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, and Rome-Floyd County MPOs 2013 and TDOT 2014

2.0 TIER 1 RECORD OF DECISION

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has determined that pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 USC Section 4321 et seq.), and implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), 23 CFR 771, Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act (49 USC 303) and implementing regulations (23 CFR Part 774);[1] Federal Railroad Administration, Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 Federal Register 28545); National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC 306101 et seq.) and implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 800); Clean Air Act as amended (42 USC 7401 et seq.) and implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 51 and 93); the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531-1544) and implementing regulations (50 CFR Part 402); Clean Water Act (33 USC 1251-1387) and implementing regulations (33 CFR Parts 320 to 324 and 40 CFR Part 230) and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (36 CFR Part 59), all obligations for completing a Tier 1 NEPA environmental review process for the Project have been met. This Record of Decision (ROD) applies to the NEPA Preferred Alternative described, evaluated, and recommended in the *Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, (October 2016), Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation, all technical reports, and supporting documentation incorporated by reference, selected as the Preferred Corridor Alternative in the Tier 1 FEIS, attached to this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD document. The Tier 1 decisions include the selection of the I-75 Corridor Alternative as a general route for subsequent analysis and Tier 2 NEPA studies for the Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project (the Project).

The NEPA environmental review process will be completed for the Project when a Project Sponsor, including a Federal lead agency, undertake a Tier 2 NEPA environmental review process(es) and issue NEPA decisions for the process(es). Tier 2 NEPA studies will define a high speed ground transportation (HSGT) technology, alignment location, station locations, vehicle storage and maintenance facility (VSMF) location, ridership and cost forecasts, and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation actions for site-specific impacts. Future Tier 2 NEPA environmental review activities will take place under separate actions to be announced under separate notices by a Federal lead agency. Tier 2 NEPA environmental review activities will recommence the public and agency involvement process initiated under this Tier 1 EIS; providing additional engagement opportunities for the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local governments and agencies, and owners of rights-of-way where an HSGT alignment and HSGT facilities could be sited.

2.1 Tier 1 EIS Process for the HSGT Project

FRA is the lead Federal agency responsible for conducting the NEPA environmental review process for the Project and issuing this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. FRA, in cooperation with GDOT and TDOT, prepared a Tier 1 EIS to evaluate the program-level environmental consequences of a proposed new high-speed intercity passenger rail service corridor connecting Atlanta, GA and Chattanooga, TN. The Tier 1 EIS process began with FRA's publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on August 22, 2007. The NOI announced the intent to prepare a Tier 1 EIS. Following the NOI, FRA, GDOT and TDOT initiated a scoping process to inform the public, interest groups, and involved agencies about the proposed Project, Corridor Alternatives, and issues for public and agency review and input. Comments and recommendations received during the scoping process by the public, stakeholders and agencies were used to refine the Project's Purpose and Need

[1] 23 CFR 774 applies to the Federal Highway Administration, but FRA will use these regulations as guidance when appropriate.

Statement, Corridor Alternatives, and the scope of the environmental analysis to be included in the Tier 1 EIS process.

2.2 Purpose and Need for the Project

FRA, GDOT, and TDOT developed the Purpose and Need for the Project during the Scoping process following the issuance of the NOI to prepare this Tier 1 EIS. The Purpose and Need remained consistent between the Tier 1 DEIS and Tier 1 FEIS and is presented in **Chapter 1.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS, and, in summary is: the purpose of the project is to enhance intercity mobility and economic growth within the project study area based on the need to address population and employment growth within the region, increasing travel demand and highway congestion, and limited transportation options. The project also serves the growing need for enhanced access to airports and intermodal facilities in Atlanta, GA and Chattanooga, TN and within the project study area. The Purpose and Need serves as the basis for the development of the Project objectives and goals and performance measures for which the FRA has based its Decision in selecting the NEPA Preferred Corridor for the Project.

2.3 Alternatives Considered in the Tier 1 DEIS

The alternatives considered under the Tier 1 DEIS and Tier 1 FEIS remained consistent. The Tier 1 DEIS evaluated a No Build Alternative and three Corridor Build Alternatives. The methodology and screening process used to develop the No Build Alternative and Corridor Alternatives considered during the Tier 1 EIS process are described in **Chapter 2.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS. The No Build Alternative and Corridor Alternatives were evaluated against the performance measures developed for the Tier 1 EIS process, their effectiveness in meeting the Purpose and Need for the Project, and are compared in consideration of their relative benefits and consequences to each other and are presented in **Chapter 6.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS. **Table 2-1** in the Tier 1 DEIS provides a summary comparison of each Corridor Alternative considered in the Tier 1 DEIS.

2.4 Description of the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative

The NEPA Preferred Alternative is the I-75 Corridor Alternative, identified as the Preferred Corridor Alternative in the Tier 1 FEIS **Section 3.1** and illustrated in **Figure 2-1**. The I-75 Corridor Alternative is an approximately 1,000-foot wide corridor that begins on the eastern side of Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJAIA) immediately adjacent to Interstate 75 (I-75) and follows I-75 northward to near I-285 where the corridor then follows the I-75 and I-85 shared facility (Downtown Connector) northward to the University Avenue overpass where the corridor then follows along both the Norfolk Southern-owned railroad right-of-way and I-75/I-85 into Downtown Atlanta. This allows for two design options to be further evaluated during additional planning activities and Tier 2 NEPA studies during any subsequent phases of the Project, including a potential connection to the proposed Georgia Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) site near Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive in Downtown Atlanta. Both corridor design options continue northward to I-75 at Howell Mill Road where the corridor then follows I-75 northward to I-24 south of Chattanooga, TN. North of I-24 the corridor continues parallel to CSX-owned railroad right-of-way (W&L railroad line) into Downtown Chattanooga. Stations would likely be located at HJAIA, Downtown Atlanta, Cumberland Galleria, Town Center, Cartersville, Dalton, Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport (CMA), and Downtown Chattanooga. The 1,000-foot wide I-75 Corridor Alternative gives Project Sponsors the flexibility to develop one or more alignments during Tier 2 NEPA studies and to potentially avoid or minimize impacts to resources within the corridor.

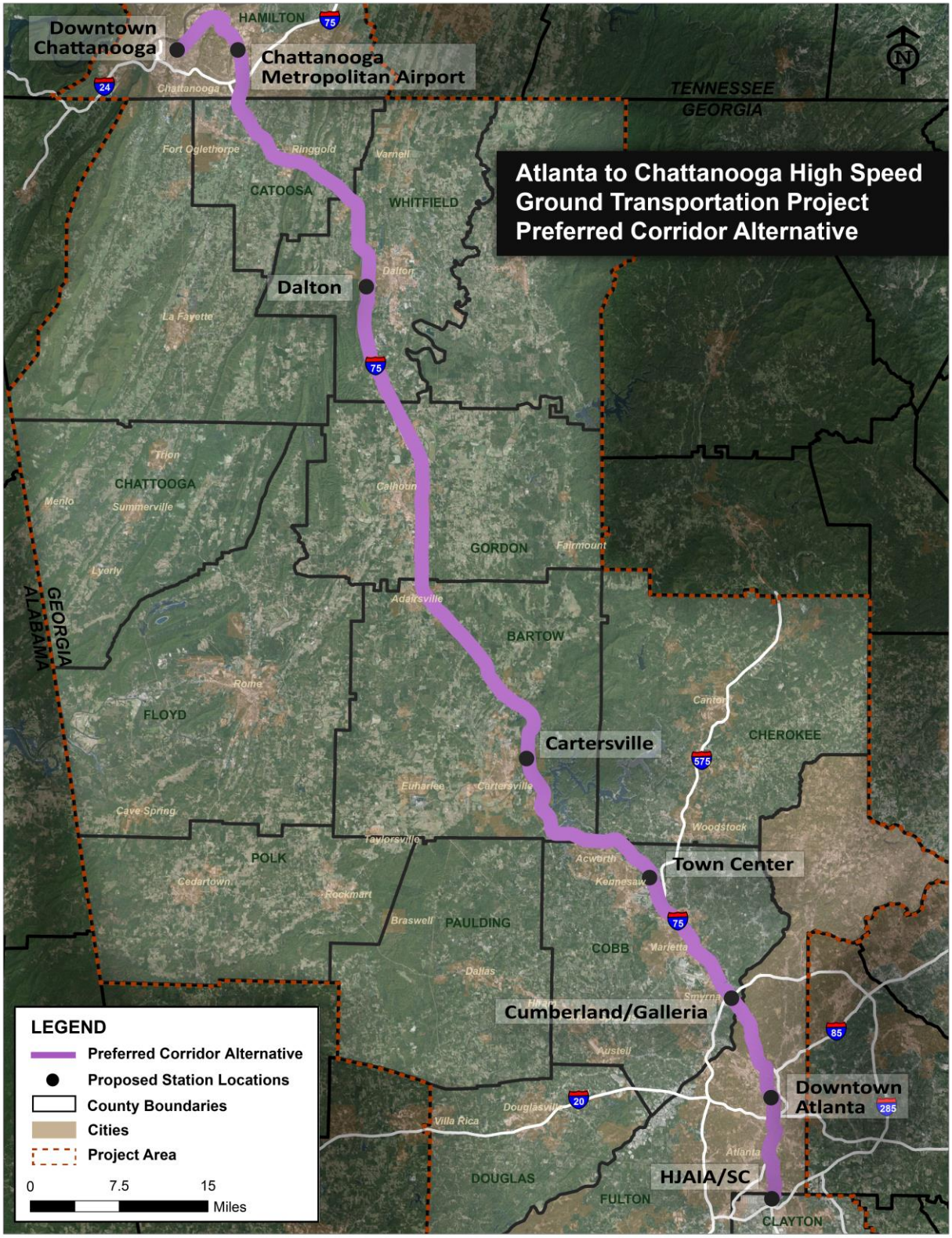
Table 2-1: Comparative Summary of the Corridor Build Alternatives

Needs	Measures	Corridor Alternative		
		I-75 (NEPA Preferred)	East	I-75/Rome
Enhance regional transportation mobility and accessibility	Time to Travel Alternative End to End (minutes)	88	95	102
	Population within 10 miles of Proposed Station Locations (millions)	2.85	2.86	2.95
	Employment within 5 Miles of Proposed Station Locations (thousands)	869	870	894
	Daily Ridership (number of boardings)	11,725	8,556	13,204
Spur economic growth and regional vitality	Capital Cost (2014$ millions)	$8,760	$10,420	$9,811
Provide safe, efficient, reliable transportation	Provide passenger HSGT service on exclusive guideway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enhance airport access and intermodal connections	Provide access to HJAIA and CMA; connect to MARTA, GRTA and CCT service areas	Yes	Yes	Yes
Improve air quality nonattainment areas and minimize environmental impacts	Proportion of Corridor Alternative within Existing Transportation Corridor (percent)	76%	31%	53%
	Ratio of EJ areas to overall corridor (based on linear miles)	0.6:1	0.5:1	0.5:1
	Noise-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	5,914	7,519	8,425
	Vibration-sensitive Land Uses (acres)	891	1,695	1,372
	Ratio of Station Areas with and without EJ populations	6:2	6:2	6:2
	Parklands and Wildlife Refuges (acres)	443	447	442
	Parklands and Wildlife Refuges (number)	25	19	30
	Known Archaeological Resources (number)	32	46	38
	Known Historic Resources (number)	26	66	33
	Cemeteries (number)	4	3	5
	Wetlands (acres)	205	205	251
	Stream Crossings (number)	21	18	35
	Floodplains (acres)	1,563	2,576	1,689
	Known Threatened and Endangered Species Habitats (number)	21	38	21
	Known Threatened and Endangered Species Habitats (acres)	1,907	2,158	1,817

2.4.1 Preferred HSGT Technology

HSGT is a mode of transportation that can travel at greater speeds than traditional passenger rail technology and can provide improved passenger mobility and reduce travel times in the Project Study Area. An HSGT technology was not selected for the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. A Preferred HSGT technology selection will be made during Tier 2 NEPA studies at subsequent phases of the Project.

Figure 2-1: Preferred Corridor Alternative – I-75 Corridor Alternative



Source: AECOM GIS

2.4.2 Preferred HSGT Corridor Attributes

The vertical alignments would vary along the I-75 Corridor Alternative from at-grade, elevated structure, and tunnel sections, depending on the topographic, land use, land cover, and environmental conditions along the route. The exact location and alignment configurations will be defined during subsequent planning activities and during Tier 2 NEPA studies. A tunnel section through Downtown Atlanta is currently assumed for the I-75 Corridor Alternative to potentially connect the HSGT alignment to the proposed Georgia MMPT in Downtown Atlanta and to avoid significant environmental impacts to the built and social environments in Downtown Atlanta and to avoid disruptions in operations at existing transportation facilities. The I-75 Corridor Alternative assumes an exclusive HSGT alignment where the entire HSGT facility would be devoted to HSGT services only; the HSGT system would not share tracks with freight or other non-HSGT passenger rail trains and all crossings with other transportation modes would be grade-separated crossings. GDOT assumes that a heavy VSMF facility will be located at HJAIA at the southern terminus for the Project corridor and TDOT assumes that a light VSMF will be located near CMA near the northern terminus for the Project. VSMF locations, designs, amenities, operations and facilities plans, and site-specific impacts such as land use and zoning considerations and the handling of potentially hazardous materials, would be evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA. The I-75 Corridor Alternative includes a total of eight stations. Stations would likely be located at HJAIA, Downtown Atlanta, Cumberland Galleria, Town Center, Cartersville, Dalton, Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport (CMA), and Downtown Chattanooga. Exact station locations, designs, amenities, and site-specific impacts such as land use and zoning considerations, would be evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA.

2.4.3 Environmental Benefits, Consequences, and Potential Mitigation for the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative

The I-75 Corridor Alternative is the best performing Corridor Alternative as evaluated in the Tier 1 DEIS and FRA selected the I-75 Corridor Alternative as the Preferred Corridor Alternative and the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative in this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. The I-75 Corridor Alternative rated High for most of the performance measures developed for the Tier 1 EIS process (see **Table 6-4** in the Tier 1 DEIS). The issues and resources that will be assessed and analyzed in the Tier 2 NEPA phase will require a site-specific design with greater precision in identifying the direct and indirect and cumulative effects of the Project on those resources identified within the Project Study Area than is possible in a broad, program-level assessment undertaken in this Tier 1 EIS process. During Tier 2 NEPA analysis, site-specific research, fieldwork, and effects analyses will be performed and the public and agency involvement program will continue.

Section 3.2 and **Table 3-1** in the Tier 1 DEIS provides a summary of potential benefits, consequences, and mitigation for the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative. The issues and resources listed below are the focus of this Tier 1 EIS process:

- **Transportation**
- **Air Quality**
- **Noise and Vibration**
- **Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice**
- **Parklands, Recreational Areas, and Wildlife Refuges**
- **Cultural Resources**

- **Water Resources**
- **Biological Resources**

Summary of environmental consequences and benefits of the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative (the I-75 Corridor):

- The I-75 Corridor would improve mobility and accessibility in the Project Study Area. Transportation benefits and impacts are based on ridership forecasts, proximity of the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative to existing transportation corridors, traffic data, and potential for the Project to transfer trips from the highway system to HSGT ridership, thereby potentially improving traffic conditions on highways;
- The I-75 Corridor would address some of the transportation needs of projected population and employment growth in the Project Study Area, particularly in terms of increasing transportation options, increasing airport and intermodal connections, address transportation limitations on economic growth, provide faster and more reliable ground transportation as an alternative to highway, intercity bus and air travel;
- The I-75 Corridor would have the shortest end-to-end travel time of approximately 88 minutes;
- The I-75 Corridor would provide an opportunity to use the largest area of existing transportation rights-of-way with only minimal use of land areas and land cover not currently classified as an existing transportation corridor;
- The I-75 Corridor would improve air quality by providing a transportation option that does not increase the quantity or the growth rate of mobile source emissions resulting from vehicle miles traveled on the highway network in the Project Study Area; and
- The I-75 Corridor would potentially have impacts on communities, parks, wildlife refuges and recreational areas, cultural resources, water resources, and biological resources identified in the Tier 1 DEIS.

A brief description of the benefits, consequences, and mitigation to be further evaluated for each resource during any subsequent phases of work for the Project, including Tier 2 NEPA studies, are summarized below:

- **Executive Order 12898 and Environmental Justice Populations:** Populations protected by Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Population and Low Income Populations* were assessed for the NEPA Preferred Corridor based on the procedures and guidance included in USDOT Order 5610.2(a), *Department of Transportation Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations*. Additional analysis during subsequent phases of the Project, including Tier 2 NEPA, would evaluate potential impacts to the populations protected by the Executive Order and would provide additional opportunities for outreach and engagement of low-income and minority populations within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative.
- **Air Quality and the Clean Air Act:** Air quality impacts were assessed as the overall potential reduction in emissions of the criteria air pollutants based on the forecast trips transferred from the highway system to HSGT ridership, thereby potentially reducing the number of vehicles on the highway systems within the Project Study Area from which mobile emissions, including emissions from the criteria air pollutants that are the subject of the

EPA's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) under the Clean Air Act. This Tier 1 EIS methodology does not include an analysis of greenhouse gases (GHG). FRA anticipates that a project-level conformity analysis would be performed during Tier 2 NEPA studies. All regulations for the determination of the Project's impact on air quality within the non-attainment regions in the Project Study Area and potential air quality impacts to neighborhoods and communities adjacent to HSGT facilities, including stations and VSMFs would be assessed at that time. An assessment of the Project's air quality impacts to populations protected by Executive Order 13045, *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks* and Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Population and Low Income Populations* would occur during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

- **Water Resources, Water Quality, and the Clean Water Act:** The Tier 1 DEIS identified numerous water resources within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative. An analysis of potential impacts to water resources, including 303(d) listed impaired waters, and general water quality within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative would occur during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

- **Section 4(f) and Section 6(f):** Based on parklands, recreational areas, and wildlife refuges resources identified during the desktop analysis of the GIS database, the resources identified include several properties and resources protected under Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative. The potential use of these resources protected by Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) as a result of the Project will be further evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

- **Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act:** Historic and archeological resources identified during desktop analysis of the GIS database will be further evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA studies. Further consultation activities with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Tennessee SHPO, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO), and other consulting parties as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) will occur during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

- **High Speed Ground Transportation Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment:** Potential noise and vibration effects from the Project were identified during an initial screening procedure during the Tier 1 EIS. The screening procedure followed the guidelines of the FRA *High Speed Ground Transportation Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment Manual* (FRA 2012). Specifically, the screening procedure consisted of the identification of potential noise- and vibration-sensitive receptors through GIS-based analysis of current and future land use data within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative. A general assessment which determines the potential for noise and vibration impacts from the Project by applying simplified models to estimate HSGT vehicle noise and vibration to existing ambient conditions within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative will be performed during Tier 2 NEPA studies. A detailed noise and vibration analysis may be performed at subsequent phases of the Project. The detailed analysis allows for site-specific noise and vibration predictions and mitigation evaluations for receptors following the general assessment once the location of HSGT alignments and facilities are determined.

- **Farmland Protection Policy Act and Farmland Soils:** The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FFPA) intends to minimize the impact of Federal programs that may result in the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. It assures to the extent possible that Federal programs are administered to be compatible with State, local and private programs and policies to protect farmland. Federal agencies, including the FRA, are required to develop and review their policies and procedures to implement the FFPA, this

includes FRA's HSIPR Corridor Programs. Because of the program-level evaluation of this Tier 1 EIS, the level of information currently available does not include the location and attributes of an HSGT alignment and other HSGT facilities. Therefore, the Tier 1 EIS process evaluated the potential impacts of the Project on land use and land cover conversion as a percentage of land not within existing transportation rights-of-way.

"Portion of Corridor Alternative within Existing Transportation Corridor (percent)" was included as a performance measure developed for the evaluation of the Corridor Alternatives. The NEPA Preferred Alternative was the best performing alternative for this performance measure (see **Chapter 3.0** and **Chapter 6.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS). The evaluation methodology assumed that any land use and land cover areas not considered existing transportation rights-of-way for the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative, would be further evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA studies to determine the potential effects of the Project on any land use and land cover conversion, including farmland soils protected by the FFPA. Farmland soils within the Project Study Area with any level of designation by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will be identified and mapped relative to the proximity of the Project and Farmland Conservation Impact Rating Forms will be completed and submitted to NRCS during Tier 2 NEPA studies when information about the location of HSGT facilities within the corridor becomes available. See **Appendix B** for correspondence received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), NRCS, during the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review period.

- **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation:** FRA believes that it is reasonable to assume under this Tier 1 EIS process that the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative would result in fewer GHG emissions along with the criteria air pollutants identified in **Chapter 3.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS as the Project has the potential to transfer trips from the highway system to HSGT ridership, thereby potentially reducing vehicle emissions that include GHG emissions. The Project may result in GHG emissions depending on the HSGT technology selected; however, this would be the same for each Corridor Alternative considered in the Tier 1 EIS. A GHG emissions analysis will be performed during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

  Similarly, because of the program-level evaluation of this Tier 1 EIS, the level of information currently available under this Tier 1 EIS does not include the location and attributes of an HSGT alignment that would allow for the evaluation of potential climate change impacts such as flooding that may occur within the vicinity of HSGT alignments and facilities located near water resources and floodplains, and heat-related damages to HSGT infrastructure that may be intensified by climate change and extreme weather events. The potential for heat-related damages, such as rail buckling and designs to mitigate flooding potential to HSGT alignments and other HSGT infrastructure, varies by HSGT technology and will be evaluated during Tier 2 NEPA studies. See **Appendix B** for correspondence received from the USEPA during the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review period.

- **State- and Federal-Listed Species of Concern, Threatened and Endangered Species, and the Endangered Species Act:** There is the potential to encounter numerous flora (plants) and fauna (bird, bat, fish, invertebrate and vertebrate animal species) habitat and individual occurrences of species protected under state and Federal laws in the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative based on information obtained during coordination activities with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) and the Department of the Interior (DOI), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), during this Tier 1 EIS process. Further analysis of potential impacts to these resources, including a potential Section 7 consultation process under the Endangered Species Act for potential adverse impacts to protected species within the NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative, would occur during Tier 2 NEPA studies.

2.5 Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation

The Tier 1 DEIS contains a Preliminary Section 4(f) Evaluation prepared to comply with the USDOT Act of 1966 (49 USC Section 303), hereinafter referred to as "Section 4(f)" and FRA's *Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts* (64 Federal Register 28545) (see **Chapter 4.0** of the Tier 1 DEIS). The same effects assessments and methodologies, data sources, and GIS-based data sets presented in the Tier 1 DEIS to evaluate potential Section 4(f) impacts from the No Build Alternative and the Corridor Alternatives were used in the Tier 1 FEIS. The I-75 Corridor Alternative contains a total of 83 properties protected under Section 4(f) within the 1,000-foot wide NEPA Preferred Corridor Alternative. During Tier 2 NEPA studies, the Federal lead agency will further evaluate HSGT alignments within the I-75 Corridor Alternative and will then make determinations for the potential use of properties protected under Section 4(f). The tiered NEPA approach allows FRA to not preclude the ability to identify, evaluate, and ultimately select a specific corridor alternative that satisfies Section 4(f) requirements in addition to NEPA requirements for the Project. The 1,000-foot wide I-75 Corridor Alternative gives Project Sponsors the flexibility to develop one or more alignments during Tier 2 NEPA studies and to potentially avoid or minimize impacts to resources within the corridor. Opportunities to minimize harm to any Section 4(f) properties that may be used by the Project as evaluated during subsequent Tier 2 NEPA studies are not precluded by this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD.

3.0 TIER 1 FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

3.1 Preferred Corridor Alternative

The Preferred Corridor Alternative is the I-75 Corridor Alternative, an approximately 1,000-foot wide corridor that begins on the eastern side of Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJAIA) immediately adjacent to Interstate 75 (I-75) and follows I-75 northward to near I-285 where the corridor then follows the I-75 and I-85 shared facility (Downtown Connector) northward to the University Avenue overpass where the corridor then follows along both the Norfolk Southern-owned railroad right-of-way and I-75/I-85 into Downtown Atlanta. This allows for two design options to be further evaluated during additional planning activities and Tier 2 NEPA studies during any subsequent phases of the Project, including a potential connection to the proposed Georgia Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) site near Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive in Downtown Atlanta. Both corridor design options continue northward to I-75 at Howell Mill Road where the corridor then follows I-75 northward to I-24 south of Chattanooga, TN. North of I-24 the corridor continues parallel to CSX-owned railroad right-of-way (W&L railroad line) into Downtown Chattanooga. The Preferred Corridor Alternative, the I-75 Corridor Alternative, defines the general study area for additional planning activities or Tier 2 NEPA studies during subsequent phases of the Project.

3.2 Overview of Public and Agency Outreach and Coordination Since Release of the Tier 1 DEIS

This section provides an overview of the public and agency outreach and coordination that has occurred since the release of the *Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Tier 1 DEIS.* **Appendix B** contains the complete *Tier 1 DEIS Public and Agency Involvement Summary Report* which provides more detail regarding outreach and coordination activities.

3.2.1 Distribution of the Tier 1 DEIS

The Tier 1 DEIS was included in the October 7, 2016 Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register. This date marked the initiation of the public and agency review and comment period, which ran for 45 days ending November 21, 2016; however, comments were received until early 2017 because the public and agency review and comment period was opened in close proximity to the holiday time period and FRA, GDOT, and TDOT recognized that additional time was needed to provide comments.

The complete Tier 1 DEIS, including appendices, and the Tier 1 DEIS Executive Summary were made available for public review online via GDOT's and FRA's project websites. Digital copies of the Tier 1 DEIS were also available at main branch libraries in each county within the project study area. Instructions for sending comments to FRA, GDOT, or TDOT were included in the Tier 1 DEIS.

FRA and GDOT mailed letters notifying Native American Tribes, participating agencies, Federal and State agencies, and State and U.S. elected officials of availability of the Tier 1 DEIS and upcoming public meetings. GDOT also relayed an email notification to local government offices, local elected officials, and all staff-level contacts within State and local-level agency offices with jurisdiction within the Project Study Area. Legal notices announcing public meetings and the availability of the Tier 1 DEIS appeared in 17 newspapers designated as legal organs for each county within the Project Study Area.

3.2.2 Public Meetings

During the public and agency review period, the FRA and GDOT held three public meetings in Atlanta, GA, Chattanooga, TN, and Dalton, GA. The purpose of the public meetings was to provide agencies and the public with the opportunity to learn about the proposed project, ask questions, and provide comments on the DEIS, the proposed alternatives, and other issues related to the development of the Project. Those with an interest in the Project who were not able to attend the meetings were able to participate by reviewing information shared on the GDOT project website. Additionally, those who viewed the website were able to offer comments on the project through the project email address or by sending written comments to the GDOT Project Address or to the FRA.

Notice of public meetings and the availability of the Tier 1 DEIS and other project information were advertised for approximately two weeks prior to the date of each public meeting through advertisements in the newspaper legal organs for each county within the project corridor and through GDOT-run social media, the Fall 2016 Project Newsletter, and email notifications. **Table 3-1** provides a list of public meeting locations and attendance. Attendance numbers reported here are based on the number of persons who registered on a sign-in sheet and may slightly underestimate the actual number of attendees since it was not mandatory for attendees to provide their information on the sign-in sheet. Based on sign-in sheet information, 93 persons attended the three public meetings.

Table 3-1: DEIS Public Meetings

Public Meeting	Location	Date/Time	Number of attendees[1]
Atlanta, GA	GDOT General Office One Georgia Center Room 403 and 404 600 West Peachtree Street, NW Atlanta, GA 30308	Tuesday, November 15, 2016 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	16
Chattanooga, TN	Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency (CHCRPA) Development Resource Center Conference Room 1A-50 1250 Market Street # 2000 Chattanooga, TN 37402	Wednesday, November 16, 2016 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	25
Dalton, GA	City of Dalton City Hall and Administration Building Main Auditorium 300 W. Waugh Street Dalton, GA 30720	Thursday, November 17, 2017 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	52
Total			**93**

[1]Based on the number of individuals who registered on the sign-in sheets. Additional persons may have been present but did not choose to register.
Source: AECOM, 2016

Meeting attendees received handouts including the Fall 2016 Project Newsletter, facts, and frequently asked questions. Meeting attendees also had the opportunity to review project information on a series of five project boards and a looping PowerPoint presentation with voiceover narration. Comment cards were available to submit written comments and a separate area was set up for those who wished to make private comments to a court reporter.

Due to audio-visual problems during the looping presentation, the format for the public meeting in Dalton, Georgia was changed to accommodate the number of attendees present. The PowerPoint

for the looping presentation was shown and a speaker verbally narrated each slide. Afterwards, attendees were allowed to ask questions and representatives from FRA and GDOT were available to provide responses.

3.2.3 Additional Public Outreach Activities

Following the three public meetings, representatives from the City of Cartersville and Bartow County requested an additional briefing to their constituents due to the proximity of all evaluated alternatives. In response to this request, FRA, GDOT, and the Cartersville-Bartow Metropolitan Planning Organization (CBMPO) agreed that GDOT would attend one of the regularly scheduled CBMPO Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) meetings to share information on the project and its potential impacts to the City of Cartersville and Bartow County. GDOT representatives provided a brief presentation to the CBMPO TCC during the regularly scheduled TCC meeting on January 18, 2017. CBMPO TCC meeting attendees were invited to provide comments on the DEIS through January 31, 2017.

3.2.4 Comments and Responses on the Tier 1 DEIS

The FRA, GDOT, and TDOT encouraged public review and comment on the Tier 1 DEIS at each of the public meetings and through notices in the Federal Register, the Fall 2016 Project Newsletter, social media postings, advertisements in the legal organs of each county in the Project Study Area and on the FRA and GDOT project websites. During the public and agency review period for the Tier 1 DEIS, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT received a total of 49 comments. Comments were submitted in several formats, including email, US mail, or at public meetings on comment sheets and through the services of a court reporter provided at each public meeting. Comments received represented the viewpoints from Native American Tribes, Federal, State and local government agencies, businesses, residents, interested individuals, and property owners. Of the submittals, 28 comments generally were in support of the Project, and two (2) were generally opposed to the Project. The remaining comments were on specific information provided in the DEIS, requesting further review, or acknowledging receipt and review of the Tier 1 DEIS. Most comments were received from the public. Most comments indicating support for a particular corridor evaluated in the Tier 1 DEIS supported the I-75 corridor, due to the minimal environmental impacts and direct route. Several comments also suggested that FRA and GDOT consider a hybrid alternative of the I-75 and I-75/Rome Corridor, citing the importance of serving Rome as a key factor.

The project sponsors have reviewed all of the public and agency comments, prepared responses, and have taken the comments into consideration in the decision-making process for the Tier 1 EIS. Upon publication of this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, letters will be sent to all individuals and agencies that provided comments during the public and agency review period. The letters will inform the commenters that the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD, which includes responses to comments, is available for public and agency review for approximately 30 days after the FRA official signs the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD document. The FRA will hold at least a 30-day waiting period after the release of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD allowing the public, stakeholders, Native American Tribes, Federal, State, and local agencies the opportunity to review and provide input on the Preferred Corridor Alternative and the contents of the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD. This will not be a formal review and comment period and the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will not respond to individual comments similar to the Tier 1 DEIS public and agency review and comment period. Rather, the FRA, GDOT, and TDOT will consider input received on the Tier 1 FEIS/ROD for any subsequent phases of the Project, which may include a Tier 2 NEPA process.

3.3 Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table

Table 3-2 documents changes that have been made to the Tier 1 DEIS released on October 7, 2016. **Appendix A** of this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD contains the edited Tier 1 DEIS based on the actions listed and described in **Table 3-2** and where changes were made to the text, tables, or figures, a yellow highlight is included. The edited Tier 1 DEIS combined with the Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table is issued as the Tier 1 FEIS for the Project under this Tier 1 FEIS/ROD.

Table 3-2: Tier 1 DEIS Errata Table

ID	Chapter	Page(s) in Tier 1 DEIS	Description of Action	Page(s) in Tier 1 FEIS	Comment Number Addressed (see Appendix C)
1	0. Executive Summary	0-6	In **Section 0.1.3.4: Alternatives Evaluated in this Tier 1 DEIS**, revised reference to "CSX rail ROW" located between Rome and where the I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative would re-join I-75 to "NS rail ROW."	0-6	**N/A:** Errata identified in open house portion of Dalton Public Hearing
2	0. Executive Summary	0-12	Revised text in **Section 0.3: Evaluation of Alternatives** to more clearly reflect the benefits of the Corridor Build Alternatives.	0-12	34
3	0. Executive Summary	0-12 through 0-13	In **Section 0.3: Evaluation of Alternatives**, revised ratings of High, Medium, and Low to Best-Performing Corridor Alternative, Moderately-Performing Corridor Alternative, and Worst-Performing Corridor Alternative. In addition, included text to define the ratings and revised the legend of **Table 0-3: Summary of Distinguishing Performance Measures** to be consistent with revision.	0-12 through 0-13	38
4	0. Executive Summary	0-12	Revised **Table 0-3: Summary of Distinguishing Performance Measures** to reflect a rating of Worst-Performing Corridor Alternative for the I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative with regard to Noise-sensitive Land Uses (acres) as it had the highest number of impacts of the three Corridor Alternatives for that particular measure.	0-12	**N/A:** Errata identified by Project Team
5	2. Alternatives Considered	2-1	In **Section 2.1.1: High Speed Ground Transportation Train Technologies**, added a clarification that the Tier 1 Record of Decision will not include a decision on technology.	2-1	3, 4, 28, 31, 42
6	2. Alternatives Considered	2-21 through 2-22	In **Section 2.2: Corridor Screening Process and Results**, included further information regarding the screening for reasonable alternatives.	2-21 through 2-22	3, 4, 28, 31, 42
7	2. Alternatives Considered	2-23	In **Table 2-5**, updated project number for US 411 Connector project.	2-23	**N/A:** Errata identified by Project Team

ID	Chapter	Page(s) in Tier 1 DEIS	Description of Action	Page(s) in Tier 1 FEIS	Comment Number Addressed (see Appendix C)
8	2. Alternatives Considered	2-25	In **Section 2.3.2: Corridor Alternatives**, revised reference to "CSX" rail ROW located between Rome and where the I-75/Rome Corridor Alternative would re-join I-75 to "NS" rail ROW.	2-25	**N/A:** Errata identified in open house portion of Dalton Public Hearing
9	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-1	In **Section 3.1: Introduction**, revised text due to a spelling error.	3-1	**N/A:** Errata identified by Project Team
10	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-15	Revised title of **Figure 3-4: Use of Existing Transportation Corridors** to "Use of Existing Highway Corridors."	3-15	**N/A:** Errata identified by Project Team
11	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-21 through 3-23	Revised **Section 3.4.2: Methodology** and **Section 3.4.6: Subsequent Analysis** of the Air Quality analysis to reflect that future phases of the Project will include a conformity determination.	3-21 through 3-23	38
12	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-28 through 3-29	Included additional introductory text to **Section 3.6: Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice**, and text in **Section 3.6.1: Legal and Regulatory Context** to include effects on children, as per Executive Order 13045 – Protection of Children From Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks.	3-28 through 3-29	38
13	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-39 through 3-40	Included additional text in **Section 3.6.6: Subsequent Analysis** to include effects on children, as per Executive Order 13045 – Protection of Children From Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks.	3-40 through 3-41	38
14	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-45	Added text to **Section 3.7.6: Subsequent Analysis** to reflect the potential for impacts to conservation lands and mitigation of these types of impacts.	3-47	37, 41, 49
15	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-64	Revised text in **Section 3.9.3.2 Streams, Lakes, and Watersheds** to accurately reflect the location of the Chattahoochee River headwaters.	3-66 through 3-67	37
16	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-73	Revised **Table 3-24** to include fishing designations.	3-75	38
17	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-76	In **Section 3.9.4: Environmental Consequences**, added text regarding construction effects on water resources and water quality and effects to groundwater that could occur due to blasting/drilling activities or through natural fissures.	3-78	38

ID	Chapter	Page(s) in Tier 1 DEIS	Description of Action	Page(s) in Tier 1 FEIS	Comment Number Addressed (see Appendix C)
18	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-77	In **Section 3.9.6: Permits**, added information regarding Section 408 and coordination that would be required for impacts to Lake Allatoona or any streams/open waters considered a Public Works project within the Mobile Basin.	3-79	44
19	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-78	In **Section 3.9.7: Subsequent Analysis**, added geotechnical assessments to the list of subsequent analysis to occur in Tier 2 to ensure that the project would not pollute groundwater through natural fissures or during blasting/drilling activities.	3-80	37
20	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-82 through 3-87	Revised **Table 3-25**: Reformatted table to organize by species scientific name, rather than county. Added a footnote to the state status column to indicate that state status applies to the applicable state or both Georgia and Tennessee unless the differences in state status are specified. Updated federal and state status for species based on updated IPaC and GDNR data. Corrected spelling of scientific name for Freckled Darter. Combined instances of the same species with differing common names used by Georgia and Tennessee.	3-84 through 3-90	37
21	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-89	In **Section 3.10.3: Affected Environment**, clarified text regarding the *Etowah Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan* to reflect that it is not formally adopted, but provides guidance for the protection of water quality and imperiled aquatic species.	3-92	37
22	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-90	Added text to **Section 3.10.5: Potential Mitigation** to reflect mention of minimization strategies and to add consideration of conservation banking and in-lieu fee or in-kind mitigation for unavoidable impacts to listed species and their habitats.	3-93	37, 49
23	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-90	Added text to **Section 3.10.6: Subsequent Analysis** to reflect information and analyses that would be carried out in Tier 2 and that the USFWS has requested be considered for this project.	3-93 through 3-94	49
24	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-95	In **Section 3.11.3: Potential for Secondary and Cumulative Effects**, added additional information indicating that station locations were preliminary and conceptual in nature at this point in the process. Station configurations and layouts will be refined to a greater level of precision during future analysis.	3-95	38

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25	3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences	3-94	In **Section 3.11.3.4: Subsequent Analysis**, added examples of resources to be further evaluated in Subsequent Tier 2 analysis for the potential for secondary land development and cumulative effects.	3-98	38
26	6. Evaluation of Alternatives	6-7	Revised text in **Section 6.3: Balancing Benefits and Effects** to more clearly reflect the benefits of the Corridor Build Alternatives.	6-7	34
27	6. Evaluation of Alternatives	6-7 through 6-8	In **Section 6.3 Balancing Benefits and Effects**, revised ratings of High, Medium, and Low to Best-Performing Corridor Alternative, Moderately-Performing Corridor Alternative, and Worst-Performing Corridor Alternative. In addition, included text to define the ratings and revised the legend of **Table 6-4: Summary of Distinguishing Performance Measures** to be consistent with revision and table included in the Executive Summary.	6-8 through 6-9	38